



Palliative care to move to front burner?

Federal Health Minister Allan Rock was to announce a major palliative care initiative in late December or early January, which was to mark the largest-ever joint project linking Health Canada and the private sector. The Canadian Palliative Care Initiative (CPCI) was proposed by Drs. David Kuhl, Harvey Chochinov and Gerri Fragerthe on behalf of the Canadian Palliative Care Association; it was a response to recommendations from the Special Senate Committee on Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide, which recommended that

palliative care programs be given high priority. (Canada is behind the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand in establishing palliative care as a recognized medical discipline.)

The initiative is being driven, at least in part, by demographics: Canada will have 4 million residents older than 75 by 2036, and this means the debate on euthanasia and assisted suicide will likely gain momentum. Growing numbers of studies suggest that many people requesting assisted death do so because of poor management of pain and other symptoms; the desire to die often decreases when these issues are addressed.

The CPCI proposal states that “educational deficiencies” are part of the problem. A 1996 survey of Canadian medical schools found that the average time allocated to palliative care at the undergraduate level was 10 hours, and no school included mandatory contact with terminally ill patients.

The triple prongs of the CPCI are faculty scholarships, studentships and grants programs, which are supposed to create a community of committed clinicians and researchers. Research priorities include symptom management in end-of-life care, delivery issues such as home care and pharmaceutical, and vulnerable populations.

Organic cigarettes new fad for “health-conscious” smokers

Next time you’re stocking up on granola at the health food store, you may find another unadulterated product that is becoming popular in Canada and the US — organically grown American Spirit cigarettes manufactured by New Mexico’s Santa Fe Natural Tobacco Company. They are currently available at more than a dozen sites across Canada.

Robin Sommers, Santa Fe’s president and CEO, says the New Age smokes are made from whole-leaf tobacco and contain no chemical additives, preservatives, reconstituted sheet tobacco, stems, flavourings, moisteners or burning agents. In contrast, popular American-blend cigarettes contain only 60% of shred cut from tobacco lamina. Although they have higher levels of nicotine and tar than conventional smokes, the all-natural cigarettes contain none of the many substances that major tobacco com-

panies have disclosed are added to their products. Sommers stops short of claiming his American Spirit cigarettes are healthy, but disingenuously notes that no studies have



been done on them. A health-conscious runner, he doesn’t smoke.

The premium-price cigarettes are available in regular filter, menthol filter, unfiltered and “Pow Wow Blend”; the latter is a combination of tobacco and herbs like red willow bark and sage, as well as organic pouch tobacco. Sold under the com-

pany’s thunderbird icon, packages feature a silhouette of an Indian in a feathered headdress puffing on a long-stemmed peace pipe. The politically correct products are advertised in alternative magazines such as *Mother Earth News*, *Vegetarian Times* and the *Utne Reader*.

No sales figures are released for the privately owned company, but industry analysts estimate that its 1997 sales will top US\$55 million. Sales are especially brisk in San Francisco and Seattle and in college towns like Madison, Wis. Overseas markets are also being considered.

The company’s success in riding the 1990s’ lust for natural products has spurred several major cigarette manufacturers to begin marketing their own “microsmokes.” The Philip Morris Co. has introduced Dave’s, while R.J. Reynolds created its Moonlight Tobacco subsidiary to market products with names like Sedona and Planet. — © Gil Kezwer